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"Things Work Out For Me," A Memoir-Writing and Art Practice

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“THINGS WORK OUT FOR ME,”

A MEMOIR-WRITING AND

ART PRACTICE

By

Jennifer Hooper

B.S. Bentley College, 1990

A THESIS

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Fine Arts (in Intermedia)

The Graduate School

The University of Maine

August 2016

Advisory Committee:

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“THINGS WORK OUT FOR ME,”
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By Jennifer Hooper

Thesis Co-Advisor: Susan Smith

Thesis Co-Advisor: Owen Smith

An Abstract of the Thesis Presented in Partial
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Master of Fine Arts (in Intermedia)
August 2016

My intermedia practice has evolved over time. When I started the program in the fall of 2011, I was eager “to explore storytelling through multimedia to create meaningful experiences that both entertain and educate audiences.” This goal has remained pervasive throughout my five years in the program, but has grown richer by exploring two additional components: community engagement and entrepreneurship.

I have always enjoyed involving the community in my work, particularly when my work can serve as a catalyst for forming connections among unrelated entities. You can see examples of these practice in my Intermedia MFA portfolio (in the next section), although two projects stand out in particular. The first is my Community Connector mobile phone app, which connected a new media class project among a local mobile app development company, staff from the City of Bangor, and Bangor-area bus riders. The second was the community engagement initiative called “Spark Bangor,” which brought together a wide array of participants including community members, city officials, local businesses, community art walks, volunteers, city government committees, a UMaine

Sociology intern, and others. Connecting and integrating my work into “real life” is important to me.

Entrepreneurship has played a big role in my practice too. As I have pursued my Intermedia MFA, I have also earned an Innovation Engineering Graduate Certificate at the University of Maine. Innovation Engineering classes taught me strategies for creating new ideas, communicating those ideas, and making the ideas real. The three pillars of this program—Create, Communicate, and Commercialize—have served me well as I’ve planned and pursued much of my MFA work. The graduate certificate, along with my concurrent experience working as a staff person at the University of Maine Foster Center for Student Innovation, taught me how to test the validity of ideas, iterate through cycles of learning to make ideas better, pitch ideas in front of audiences, and leverage websites and social media to promote my work.

Writing is my true passion. When I entered graduate school, I wanted to learn to learn how to write more creatively, and I have found many opportunities to do that. I have taken four writing classes (plus a spring break writing workshop), which have given me ample opportunities to take risks, make mistakes, get iterative loops of feedback, and emerge feeling very strong about my ability to craft meaningful essays. The evolution in my writing skills has given me the confidence to put my writing out into the world. Other components of the Intermedia program have taught me ways to make the writing richer, bigger, broader, and have more impact by complementing the writing itself (mere words) with other forms of art such as visual narratives, performance, objects, and community interaction.

My Intermedia Masters of Fine Art (IMFA) thesis project combines art, life, and community using the three cornerstones of my Intermedia practice: community engagement, entrepreneurship, and writing.

The final outcomes of my thesis project include:

- A series of personal essays that reflect a memoir-writing practice
- A series of visual narratives, artifacts, and objects that comprised an art exhibit at the 2016 Without Borders show at the University of Maine, Lord Hall Gallery, from May 20 to July 2, 2016.
- “Takeaways” for exhibit attendees:
 - A booklet of personal essays titled “Things Work Out For Me,” which became the foundation for my memoir-writing practice. I designed, edited, and self-published a limited edition run of 50 copies, which I made available for free in the gallery.
 - A temporary tattoo that said, “Things Work Out For Me,” also made available for free in the gallery

This paper focuses on my evolving memoir writing practice, which has evolved through the process of writing a series of personal essays. While I shared just a few essays in my final thesis booklet, my memoir writing practice continues as I aspire to publish a finished memoir. This paper shares what I have learned through my research and experience.

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to Deborah Wing-Sproul, who *recognized* I was a square peg in a round hole, and Nina Shengold, who *believed* I was a writer before I did.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank Susan Smith, my committee chair, for tirelessly guiding me through this thesis project with incredible insight, kindness, and grace.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION.....	iv
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	viii
CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS MEMOIR?	1
CHAPTER 2: PREPARING FOR, AND WRITING, MEMOIR.....	3
Mary Karr.....	4
Abigail Thomas.....	5
Nick Flynn	5
Frank McCourt.....	7
Katherine Harrison.....	9
Sue Monk Kidd and Ann Monk Taylor	10
CHAPTER 3: A MEMOIR-WRITING PRACTICE.....	11
Struggle (and survive).....	11
Keep artifacts.	13
Distance yourself.	15
Be fearless.....	17
Read other people’s memoirs.....	19
Write a shitty first draft.....	21
Consult with your cast of characters (the beloved ones).	23
Get feedback (and prepare to feel very vulnerable).....	26
Revise, revise, revise.....	29
Read your work out loud.....	32

Repeat steps as necessary.....	34
Make it real.	36
CHAPTER 4: THESIS EXHIBIT.....	38
CHAPTER 5: PORTFOLIO	43
Community Engagement	43
Community Connector Mobile Phone App	43
Spark Bangor	45
Mural Project	53
SparkFest.....	55
Entrepreneurship	57
Innovation Engineering Graduate Certificate	57
Writing	58
Begin Again	58
Public Readings	60
Blogs	64
Things Work Out For Me	66
BIBLIOGRAPHY	67
APPENDIX: THINGS WORK OUT FOR ME.....	Pocket
BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR.....	70

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1. Struggle (and survive)	12
Figure 2. Keep artifacts.....	14
Figure 3. Distance yourself.....	16
Figure 4. Be fearless	18
Figure 5. Read other people’s memoirs	20
Figure 6. Write a shitty first draft	22
Figure 7. Consult with your cast of characters (the beloved ones).....	25
Figure 8. Get feedback (and prepare to feel very vulnerable)	28
Figure 9. Revise, revise, revise	31
Figure 10. Read your work out loud	33
Figure 11. Repeat steps as necessary	35
Figure 12. Make it real.....	37
Figure 13. The steps involved in a memoir-writing practice	40
Figure 14. Partial view of thesis exhibit	40
Figure 15. Display case with objects from a writing practice	41
Figure 16. Maps displaying routes I’ve traveled by motorcycle	41
Figure 17. Free “Things Work Out for Me” booklet of essays.....	42
Figure 18. Free “Things Work Out for Me” temporary tattoo.....	42
Figure 19. Wireframe mockup, web-based prototype, and completed commercial app for the Community Connector	44
Figure 20. Acknowledgment of collaboration with Sephone Interactive Media.....	44
Figure 21. Student in the Spotlight (photo by Amy Pierce, 2012)	45

Figure 22. Spark logo.....	46
Figure 23. Spark label.....	47
Figure 24. Storefront window filling up with Spark logos.....	48
Figure 25. Unknown participant writing on a Spark label.....	49
Figure 26. A sampling of Spark responses	49
Figure 26 (continued). A sampling of Spark responses.....	50
Figure 27. Spark exhibit at the Intermedia Open House, 2013.....	50
Figure 28. Spark exhibit at Maine Civic Hack Day, June 2013	51
Figure 29. Spark exhibit at the American Folk Festival, August 2013	51
Figure 30. Completed Spark exhibit from the American Folk Festival, 2013.....	52
Figure 31. PechaKucha promotion, August 2013	52
Figure 32. PechaKucha participants, August 11, 2013	53
Figure 33. “Murals” Spark label	54
Figure 34. A potential mural site	55
Figure 35. “Waterfire” Spark Label.....	56
Figure 36. “Begin Again” story	59
Figure 37. Photo on a hidden page on my website	59
Figure 38. Participants in the “Eat Your Words: A Literary Potluck” public reading	60
Figure 39. Program from the “Eat Your Words: A Literary Potluck” public reading.....	61
Figure 40. Participants in the “Use Your Words” public reading	62
Figure 41. Flyer promoting the “Use Your Words” public reading	62
Figure 42. Participants in the “Words With Friends” public reading.....	63
Figure 43. Flyer promoting the “Words With Friends” public reading.....	64

Figure 44. Header for “An Eager Life” website, 2015	65
Figure 45. Header for “An Eager Life” website, 2016	65
Figure 46. Header from “Her Harley” website	66

CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS MEMOIR?

The term *memoir* has two meanings. The first meaning is rooted in the French word “memoire” and the Latin word “memoria,” meaning “memory.” When a writer writes down his or her memories and weaves them with introspection, reflection and insight, the work becomes a part of the literary genre known as memoir, referring to a record of events written with intimate knowledge based on personal observation. This paper is focused on this latter definition.

There are other types of writing that involves memory—journals, diary, daybook, and others—but Hauser, author of *You Can Write a Memoir*, points out that a memoir lifts the writing onto a different plane. “The mere recording of events, mere recollection, and even contemplation and meditation are usually not enough in themselves to warrant an audience. Writers who would speak to others, who would be heard by others, will want to make the transition from ‘this is my story’ to ‘this is the story of human life, and it is therefore also your story’” (4).

The memoir is a special type of autobiography, but the two words are not interchangeable. As Judith Barrington, author of *Writing the Memoir* points out, autobiography is the story *of a life* whereas memoir is a story *from a life* (22). An autobiography typically reflects a fairly linear account *of* a person’s life from beginning to end, whereas a memoir focuses on a single story or period of time *from* a person’s life. A memoir is infused with insight, wisdom, contemplation, and discovery that emerges from a challenging or difficult period of time. “What makes a memoir isn’t just what you

remember; it's your insights about what you remember," says Darin Strauss (Haran 198).

Revelations and insights are like handles that readers can grasp onto in order to accompany a writer on his or her personal journey, even if the reader has never experienced similar circumstances. For example, most people have never hiked the Pacific Crest Trail, as Cheryl Strayed wrote about in her memoir *Wild*, but most readers can grasp onto the experiences of grief and loss from losing a loved one, as she did when she lost her mother. Humans ache to live through others' experiences and feel connected, and memoirs give us that chance. Strayed says, "The most powerful strand in memoir is not expressing your originality. It's tapping into your universality. This isn't to say you shouldn't be original in your writing—you are the only one who can write that universal experience in just that way. Trust that." (Haran 214).

"The least articulate of confessors can—in fleeting moments of connection—move me as a great symphony does. And it's from the need to capture the share connections between us that the symphonies were invented. Ditto memoirs. All drama depends on our need to connect with one another." (Karr, "The Art of Memoir," 44). Personal narratives link us together. "It is hard unearthing painful things in order to write your memoir," says Edwidge Danticat. "But you have to let yourself do it in order to reach that place where it's about more than just your own experience, where it grows into something larger than yourself. Where it becomes so transcendent that people who have had nothing like your experience can actually see themselves in what you've written." (Haran 70).

CHAPTER 2: PREPARING FOR, AND WRITING, MEMOIR

The scope of my research involved a systematic inquiry of my own life, followed by writing essays about my life. My research relied on the following methods:

- A literature review of books about writing memoir. These “how to” books were written by authors who are experienced writers who have written one or more published memoirs.
- A literature review of published memoirs by a range of authors who vary by age, gender, experiences, and writing styles.
- A review of my own journals, notes, memories, and experiences: many years worth of hand-written notes, reports, essays, and other artifacts.
- Reflection and assessment, “because life is not linear, you want to approach writing memoir sideways, using the deepest kind of thinking to sort through the layers: you want reflection to discover what the real connections are” [Goldberg xxiii].

The methodologies I used to develop my work involved synthesizing information from a variety of sources, analyzing exploring different forms of writing style, and developing my own writing practice.

The following memoir writers reflect a subset of memoir writers who have informed and inspired my writing practice of writing essays about my own life. I have learned a great deal by reading other people’s work. These writers have influenced me, and my writing style, inspiring me to take risks and make my writing richer.

Mary Karr

Mary Karr has authored three memoirs: *The Liars Club*, *Cherry*, and *Lit*, each covering three different periods of her life: early childhood, adolescence, and the years she spent as an adult alcoholic. Her writing style is raw and matter of fact, but steeped with stunning attention to physical details that draws in the reader, with the ability to turn the tragic into the humorous. Example:

“Our family’s habit of eating meals in the middle of my parents’ bed also broke overnight. Mother had made the bed extra big by stitching two mattresses together and using coat hangers to hook up their frames. She’d said that she needed some spread-out space because of the humidity, a word Lecia and I misheard for a long time as stupidity. (Hence our tendency to say, It ain’t the heat, it’s the stupidity.)” (Karr, “The Liar’s Club,” 42).

While my writing style does not mirror Karr’s dry wit, I use her work as a model for giving attention to physical details that help pull readers into a scene. Here is a passage from an essay called “The Mighty Oak” (about the last week of my father’s life), in which I describe some physical details from my childhood bedroom:

Each night, I tipsily climb the stairs to the second floor and collapse onto one of the beds in my childhood bedroom. It no longer has the big spool bed I grew up with, nor the peach-colored walls with blue stripes. My mother claimed the room years ago. Now it has taupe walls and two twin beds with pineapple bedposts. Sometimes I cry, sometimes I stare at the cracked ceiling wondering if this will be the night that Dad dies. For almost a week, he doesn’t.

And then he does.

Abigail Thomas

Abigail Thomas has authored multiple memoirs: *Safekeeping*, *A Three Dog Life*, and *What Comes Next and How to Like it*. All of her memoirs share a similar style: they are collections of short, minimalist essays that when published together, form the arc of a significant and meaningful period of her life. What I love most about Thomas's style is her ability to ooze an incredible amount of meaning and sentiment into so few words. Her essays typically range from a single paragraph to a page and a half. Here is an example of a complete essay called "Such Appetites" from *Safekeeping*:

After we got divorced he went out with a former nun for a while. "Such appetites!" he said in wonder. "Why tell me?" I asked and hung up the phone.

Thomas's writing style inspires me to sometimes write in the same brief style, as in my essay titled "The Towel Rods":

I missed having a handy guy around the house. I had to figure out how to close up the basement windows for winter.

Fix the pullout couch when kids jumped on it too hard.

Install the fucking towel rods.

Nick Flynn

Nick Flynn's memoir, *Another Bullshit Night in Suck City*, focuses on his life as a young adult navigating through a complex relationship with his absent, gregarious, and homeless father. Flynn mixes a variety of writing styles in his memoir, from long passages of prose to a complete chapter that is simply a list of all the names for getting drunk:

“...The usual I say. Essence. Spirit. Medicine. A taste. I say top shelf. Straight up. A shot. A sip. A nip. I say another round. I say brace yourself. Lift a few. Hoist a few. Work the elbow. Bottoms up. Belly up. Set ‘em up. What ‘ll it be. Name your poison. I say same again. I say all around. I say my good man. I say my drinking buddy. I say git that in ya. Then a quick one. Then a nightcap. Then throw one back. Then knock one down. Fast & furious I say. Could savage a drink I say. Chug. Chug-a-lug. Gulp. Sauce. Mother’s milk. Everclear. Moonshine. White lightning. Firewater. Hootch. Relief. Now you’re talking I say. Live a little I say. Drain it I say. Kill it I say. Feeling it I say. Wobbly. Breakfast of champions I say. I say candy is dandy but liquor is quicker. I say Houston, we have a drinking problem. I say the cause of, and solution to, all of life’s problems. I say god only knows what I’d be without you. I say thirsty. I say parched. I say wet my whistle. Dying of thirst. Lap it up. Hook me up. Watering hole. Knock a few back. Pound a few down...”
(and on and on).

Flynn’s chapter inspired me to use a list in my essay called “Thing Work Out for Me,” although my list leverages repetition across several pages instead of different words to mean the same thing:

“...But not before I confront her and look her in the eyes. As I wait, I open my laptop and type:

Things work out for me.

Things work out for me.

Things work out for me.

Things work out for me.

Things work out for me.

Things work out for me.

Things work out for me.

Things work out for me.

Things work out for me.

Things work out for me.

Things work out for me.

Things work out for me.

Things work out for me.

Things work out for me....” (and on and on).

Frank McCourt

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize, *Angela's Ashes* depicts Frank McCourt's impoverished childhood growing up in Brooklyn, NY and then Limerick, Ireland with an alcoholic father, mother, and six siblings (two of whom die at a young age) during the 1930s and 1940s. He recounts the events as if he is a boy, rather than from an adult perspective looking back. It is through this childlike lens that McCourt accepts his family circumstances simply as they are (as he knows nothing different). As he comes of age, the reader watches him recognize his parents' imperfections and fallacies, which prompts him to separate himself from them and make his own way in the world.

McCourt is a master of telling tales about horrific living conditions without judgment, bitterness, or remorse. I was inspired by his skill.

When I write stories about unfortunate circumstances from my life, I keep McCourt's writing style tucked in the back of my mind. I strive to share my personal stories in a way that will engage and connect readers to a universal experience (such as

parenting, death, or personal growth), but I work very hard to not complain, finger-point, reflect bitterness, or appear judgemental in my writing, just like McCourt.

In my essay “Dad’s Diagnosis,” I attempt to convey the experience of receiving the news of my father’s brain cancer without employing a “woe is me” tactic (on the other hand, as I reread this work, I feel that in my effort to avoid pity, I overcorrect, and now the passage seems stark and void of any feelings at all):

It’s October, and I’m in Venice, Florida with Mom. Outside, the day steamy and yellow. Inside, it’s icy cold and white. We sit in the hospital waiting room.

Waiting.

Waiting.

Waiting.

Small talk. Loud voices.

Conversations on flip phones. I listen.

“He’s in surgery right now.”

“We’re hopeful.”

“No, we don’t know anything yet.”

Hours go by.

Finally, the doctor walks in, scans the waiting room, and walks our way. His face is granite: cool and unwavering.

“It’s not good.”

“Brain cancer.”

“The worst kind.”

“I did the best I could.”

"I'm sorry."

He's a robot.

He leaves.

We cry.

Katherine Harrison

In the memoir *The Kiss*, Katherine Harrison tells the story of the incestuous relationship she had with her father when she was between the ages of 20 and 24. She tells the story in the present tense, making the reader feel like they are actually experiencing each scene along with Harrison. Through her eyes, the reader can actually empathize—and almost understand—how these events came to be. The vivid sentences made my heart beat fast at every grotesque atrocity.

"We meet at airports. We meet in cities where we've never been before. We meet where no one will recognize us.

One of us flies, the other brings a car, and it is we set out for some destination. Increasingly, the places we go are unreal places: the Petrified Forest, Monument Valley the Grand Canyon—places as stark and beautiful and deadly as those revealed in satellite photographs of distant planets. Airless, burning, in-human.

Against such backdrops, my father takes my face in his hands. He tips it up and kisses my closed eyes, my throat. I feel his fingers in the hair at the nape of my neck. I feel his hot breath on my eyelids."

Like Harrison, I write most of my personal essays in the present tense. I aspire to place readers *in* the scene rather than feel like they are outsiders looking in. Here is a passage from my essay called "My Birthday."

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I'm SORRY," you say, each iteration rising. "Stop yelling at me!" You fly down the hall. I stand up and follow you. You stop in the hallway and yell "I'M SORRY, I'M SORRY, I'M SORRY," placing your hands over your ears. You sob, big tears owing down your face. You place your hands on the wall like goal posts and start banging your head between them. THUD. THUD. THUD. "I'm a horrible person!"

I'm stunned. I melt instantly. You're hurting. Not just from my explosion.

"It's okay. It's okay. Really." I speak in a low, quiet voice now. I reach out to touch your hair. You inch and pull back, as if my hand is a hot branding iron. You drop to the floor on hands and knees and bang your head on the hardwood floor. THUD. THUD. THUD. THUD. I'm scared. Each thud stabs my heart. Fear ripples through my chest.

Sue Monk Kidd and Ann Monk Taylor

This mother-daughter pair wrote *Traveling With Pomegranates*. Using a back-and-forth style, the two authors recount a trip to they took together to Greece, Turkey, and France while each grappling with the challenges they faced in new periods of their lives (Taylor with adulthood, and Kidd with menopause).

While I had a hard time relating to this particular book (their privileged white challenges didn't feel all that significant to me, the book opened my eyes to the possibility of co-writing memoir. I had never before considered the interesting possibility of two accounts of the same events from two different perspectives. In my case, many of my experiences have been shared with my daughters, and I get excited by the possibility of someday co-authoring an essay or book with one or both of them since many of my stories are also theirs.

CHAPTER 3: A MEMOIR-WRITING PRACTICE

My current writing goal is to publish a completed memoir. I set this goal at the beginning of my final semester at the University of Maine as I was completing my Intermedia graduate degree. To date, I've written roughly 35,000-40,000 words in a collection of essays. These essays vary in both length and state of completion: some exist as unpolished rough first drafts, while others have gone through several iterations.

Through the evolution of this writing practice, I have identified 12 steps that I see are necessary for completing a memoir; they are my own unique interpretation or "formula." These steps are not sequential, but rather, iterative and often simultaneous. In other words, a writer does not proceed through these steps in order from 1 to 12, but instead, meanders through, around, and among the steps at any given time.

Working my way through these steps led me to self-publishing my limited edition, 36-page booklet or "zine," titled *Things Work Out For Me*, which I have included as an appendix in this document. The remainder of this chapter describes each step, supported by comments from other writers.

Struggle (and survive).

At the foundation of every memoir is a personal struggle, be it spiritual, physical, or emotional. Struggle can come as a result of *imposed* change, as in the case of death, divorce, loss, violence, or laws, or struggle may emerge from *choice*, as in the case of divorce, moving, travel, changing careers, or walking away. The compelling story of a memoir, however, is embedded within the *survival* of the struggle. It is by making one's

way through a difficult time and acquiring insight that makes the story becomes universal.

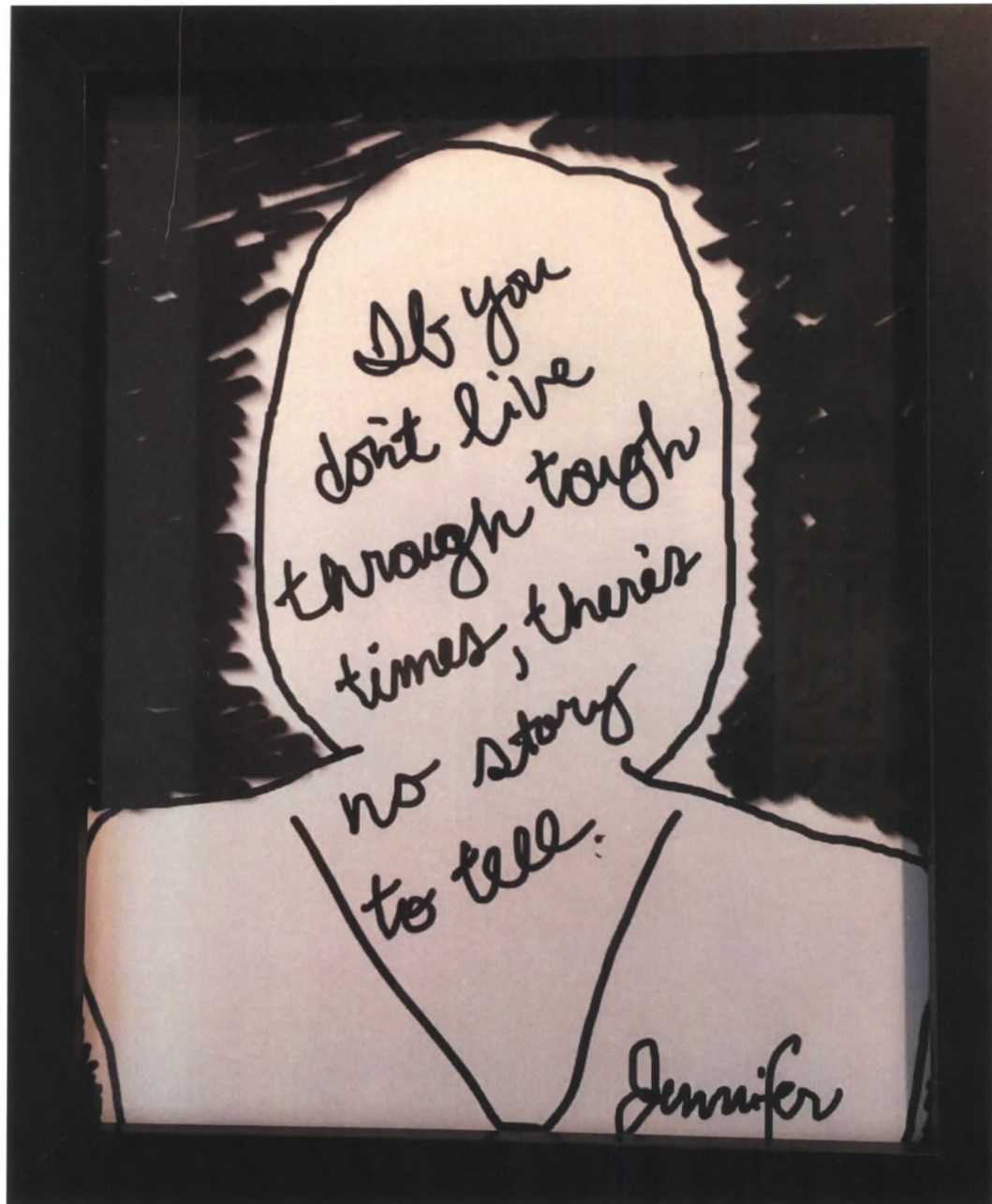


Figure 1. Struggle (and survive)

Karr wrote about her childhood was filled with alcoholism and mental health issues, McCourt wrote about poverty and alcoholism, Flynn wrote about his absent and homeless

father, Harrison reveals the incestuous relationship with her father, Kidd struggled with menopause and Taylor struggled with depression. Thomas wrote about loss, raising children alone, and aging. Strayed wrote about grief. All these struggles were infused personal growth along the way. This is what makes them so appealing.

Keep artifacts.

Artifacts are journals, photos, bills, calendars, objects, places, pens, or any other device that help spur memory. For example, I kept a calendar of all the times my ex-husband “fell through” on his promises to his children. While there’s no purpose in including the actual calendar in a memoir, notations on the calendar trigger a full range of memories about incidents that I can choose to write about.

Artifacts “are linked to the five senses—taste, touch, sight, sound and scent,” says Hauser. “For reasons no one understands very well, the senses are one of the memory trunks of the brain. And for reasons also mysterious, when we tell the story of the object, place, sound or smell that we remember, we also tell our own story.” (Hauser 18)

For me, journals serve as critical artifacts. When I flip through old hand-written pages, I discover forgotten memories, reconnect with raw emotion, and find launch points and catalysts for something I want to write about.

01-29-12

From my bed, I stare out the sliding glass door, through the vertical blinds that striped the view of the yard. The branches of the tall spruce tree ~~tapp~~ ^{tap} in the wind. I watch as the music of the wind affects the choreography of the branches, as sometimes they ~~dance~~ jitterbug and sometimes they sway. The branches are ~~hardly~~ ^{barely} moving now, as if ~~the~~ ^{an Act 3} (not right wind) ~~has come to a~~ is coming to ~~the~~ a close, orchestra winding down. When suddenly, a strong gust of wind blows by, pushing the branches in ^{in an unexpected crescendo,} hundreds of different directions. At the same time, an airplane passes overhead and for a moment, the world feels ~~the~~ topsy-turvy, ~~as if~~ chaos confusing my senses and making me feel uneasy.

I am reminded of the events of my life in the past two years. I have often felt like ~~these~~ tree branches ~~reacting to the~~ at the mercy of the wind, little choice but to remain tethered and attacked as unexpected forces push them around.

Misc: "We do full 16 ounce pounds"
(C. C. C. C.)

Figure 2. Keep artifacts

Distance yourself.

When a writer is ready to write for publication (as opposed to writing for oneself in a private journal), the work will be better if some time has passed between the struggle and the writing. One of my writing instructors at UMaine, Marjorie Irvine, counseled, “Write from the scars, not from the wounds.” What she meant was to write from a place where your emotional wounds have healed over. It is only through this passage of time that perspective can creep in. “Distance frees us of our former ego’s vanities and lets us see deeper into events” (Karr, “The Art of Memoir,” 28).

When I reflect on events that happened in my life years ago—and I examine journal entries that I wrote about the events at the time—I can see that my feelings and perspectives about those events (and the people involved, including myself) have shifted significantly. Through the passing of time, I have matured, grown wiser, and have acquired the ability to things from a different point of view; I’ve developed insights that weren’t possible when I was still close to the events.

When Pat Conroy was contemplating writing a memoir about his family—parents and siblings—he knew he had to wait until his parents had died and he was older. “I knew I wanted to wait to write it until we had time to age into it—” he said, “to let it ripen somewhat and to look back on what had happened” (Maran 40).

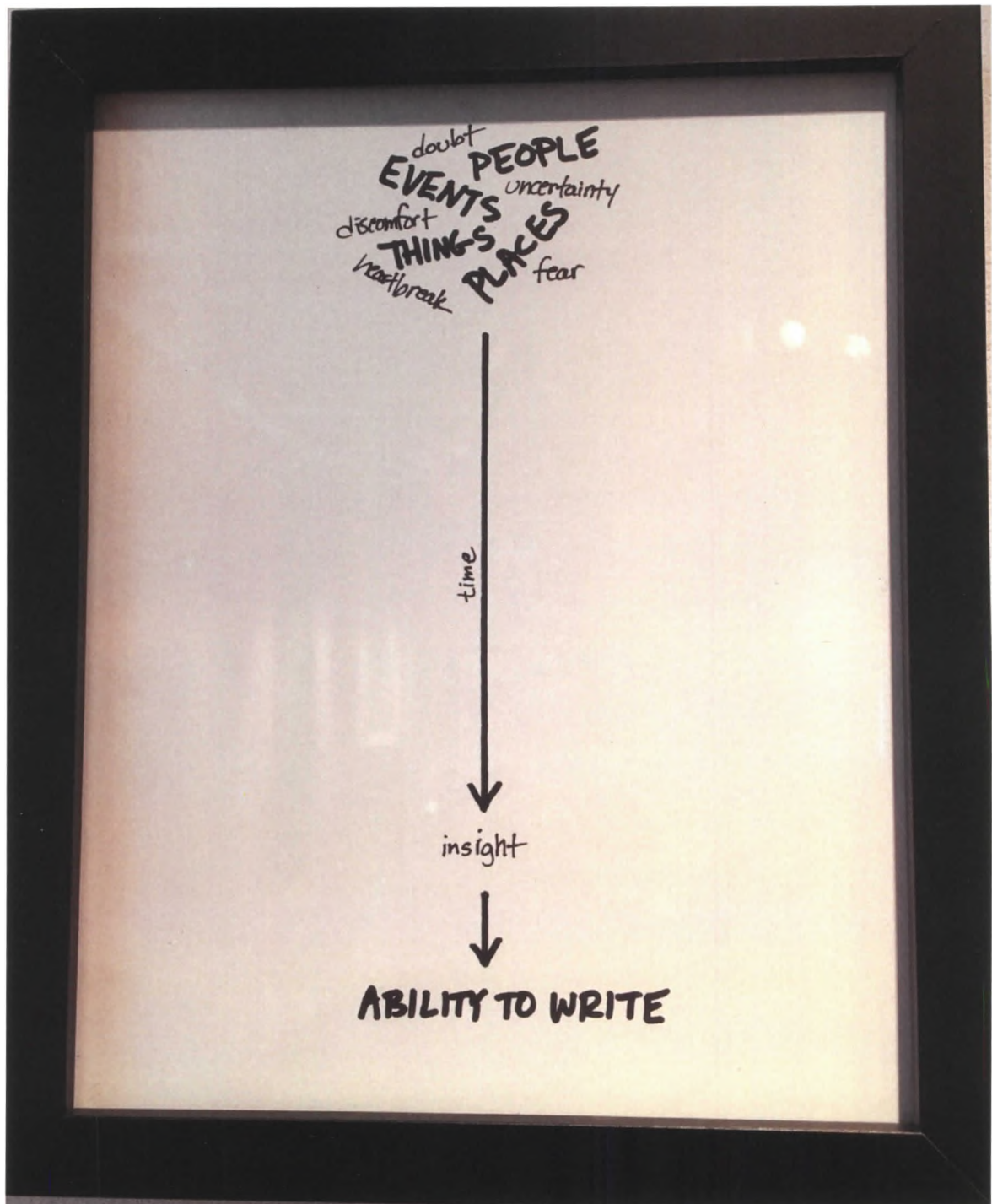


Figure 3. Distance yourself

Be fearless.

Some of the most engaging memoirs are compelling because of the author's absolute fearlessness in revealing personal details about themselves, even if (especially if) the details put the author in an unfavorable light. Consider *The Kiss* in which Harrison shares specific details about her incestuous relationship with her father. Consider Karr sharing that her addiction to alcohol forced her to swig vodka in the pouring rain on her back stoop holding a baby monitor. Consider Strayed writing about her heroin use.

"The author of a lasting memoir manages to power past the initial defenses, digging past the false self to where the truer one waits to tell the more complicated story." (Karr, "The Art of Memoir," 102.)

These unsightly moments ensure the reader that the author is authentic, which builds trust in the writer-reader relationship (the writer is a "real," flawed person). But these details are not easy revelations for a writer to share; considerable bravery is required.

"My aspiration as a memoirist is to make the largest possible segment of humanity feel that I've addressed part of their story. It's all about the audience. I want my readers to feel that I've said my story well, that I've given them some solace. Whatever I've been through, I want to make it better for someone else," says Sandra Tsing Loh (Haran 151).

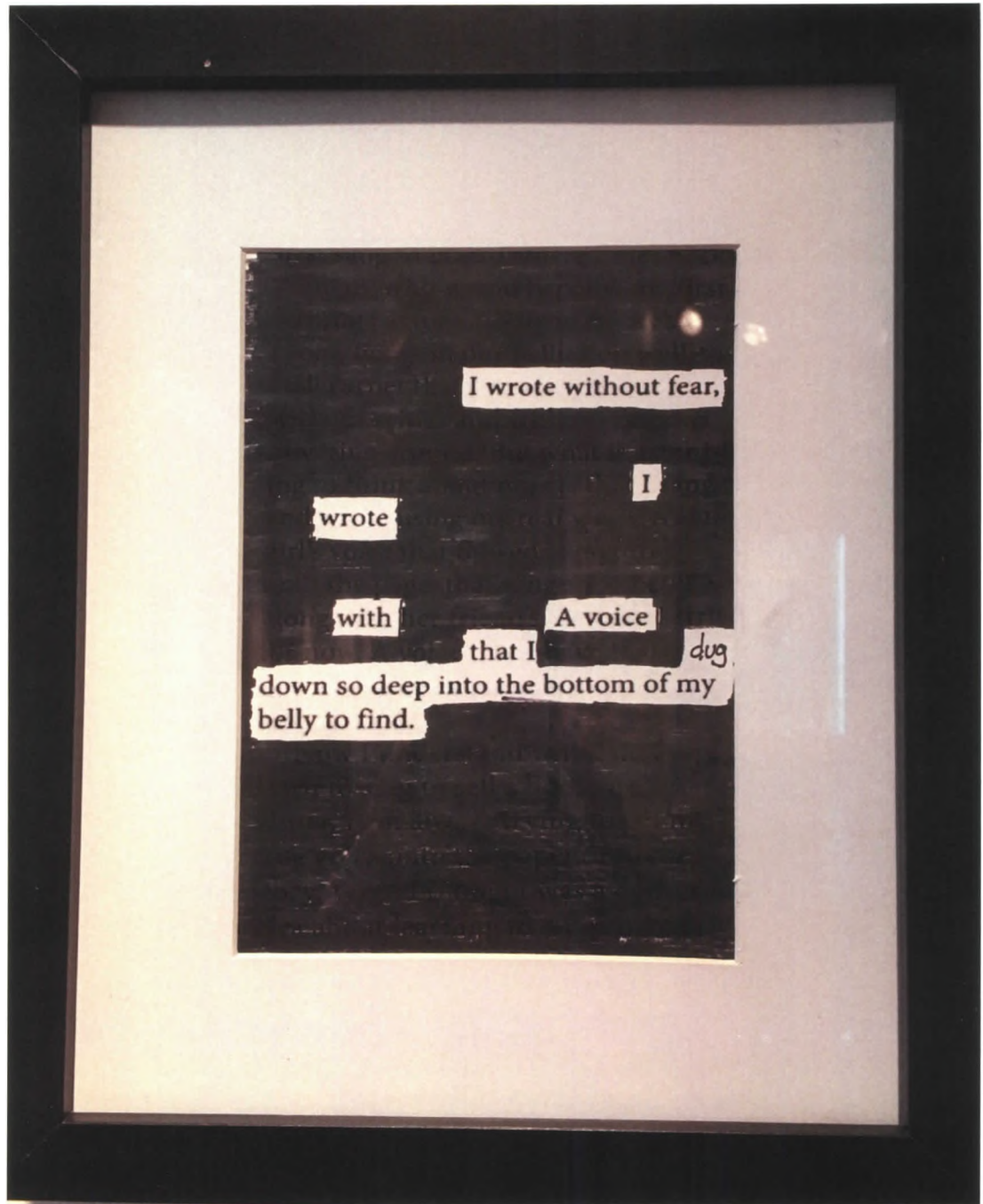


Figure 4. Be fearless

Read other people's memoirs.

A solid writing practice involves reading other people's work. In a blog post titled "*Why Writers Need to Read if They Want to Be Good*," prolific blogger Jeff Goins explains, "Good writers read. Writers need to read. A lot. Magazines. Books. Periodicals. And so on. They need to grasp the art of language, to appreciate the finer points of words. As they read, they should jot down ideas and capture thoughts as they come. Nothing inspires a writer like reading someone else's words." (<http://goinswriter.com/good-writers-read>). Stephen King says, "Can I be blunt on this subject? If you don't have time to read, you don't have time (or the tools) to write. Simple as that." (147).

As discussed in *CHAPTER 3: ANTECEDENTS*, examining how other memoirists approach their work has helped guide, inform, and influence my work. I've examined their approaches and strategies for revealing their life stories, and I've also been inspired to give attention to an array of writing strategies. Examples include giving vivid attention to physical details, using an economy of words in minimalist essays, using repetition, striving to avoid pity, and writing in the present tense.

Karr says "The best revisers often have reading habits that stretch back before the current age, which lends them a sense of history and raises their standards for quality." (*The Art of Memoir*, 211).

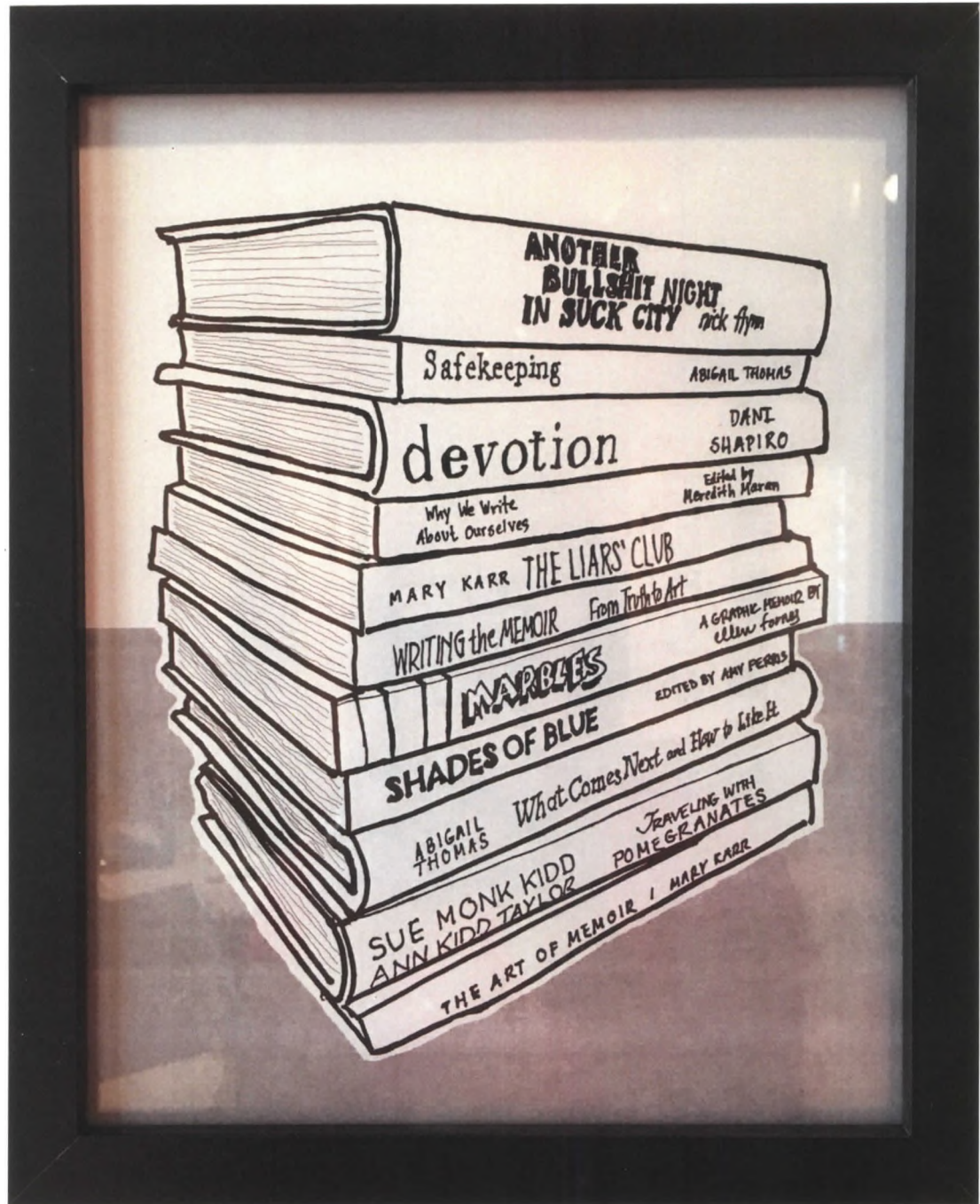


Figure 5. Read other people's memoirs

Write a shitty first draft.

Before I became a writer, I believed that other writers wrote flawlessly every time they put words on a page. I desperately wanted to be *that person* who wrote effortless prose. After taking classes, reading about writing, and talking to other writers, I now understand that amazing prose evolves over time, and that all good writing emerges out of horrendous writing. Anne Lamott's essay "Shitty First Drafts" beautifully describes the process of composing the initial draft. Here is an excerpt:

"The first draft is the child's draft, where you let it all pour out and then let it romp all over the place, knowing that no one is going to see it and that you can shape it later. You just let this childlike part of you channel whatever voices and visions come through and onto the page...Just get it all down on paper because there may be something great in those six crazy pages that you would never have gotten to by more rational, grown-up means. There may be something in the very last line of the very last paragraph on page six that you just love, that is so beautiful or wild that you now know what you're supposed to be writing about, more or less, or in what direction you might go—but there was no way to get to this without first getting through the first five and a half pages." (22)

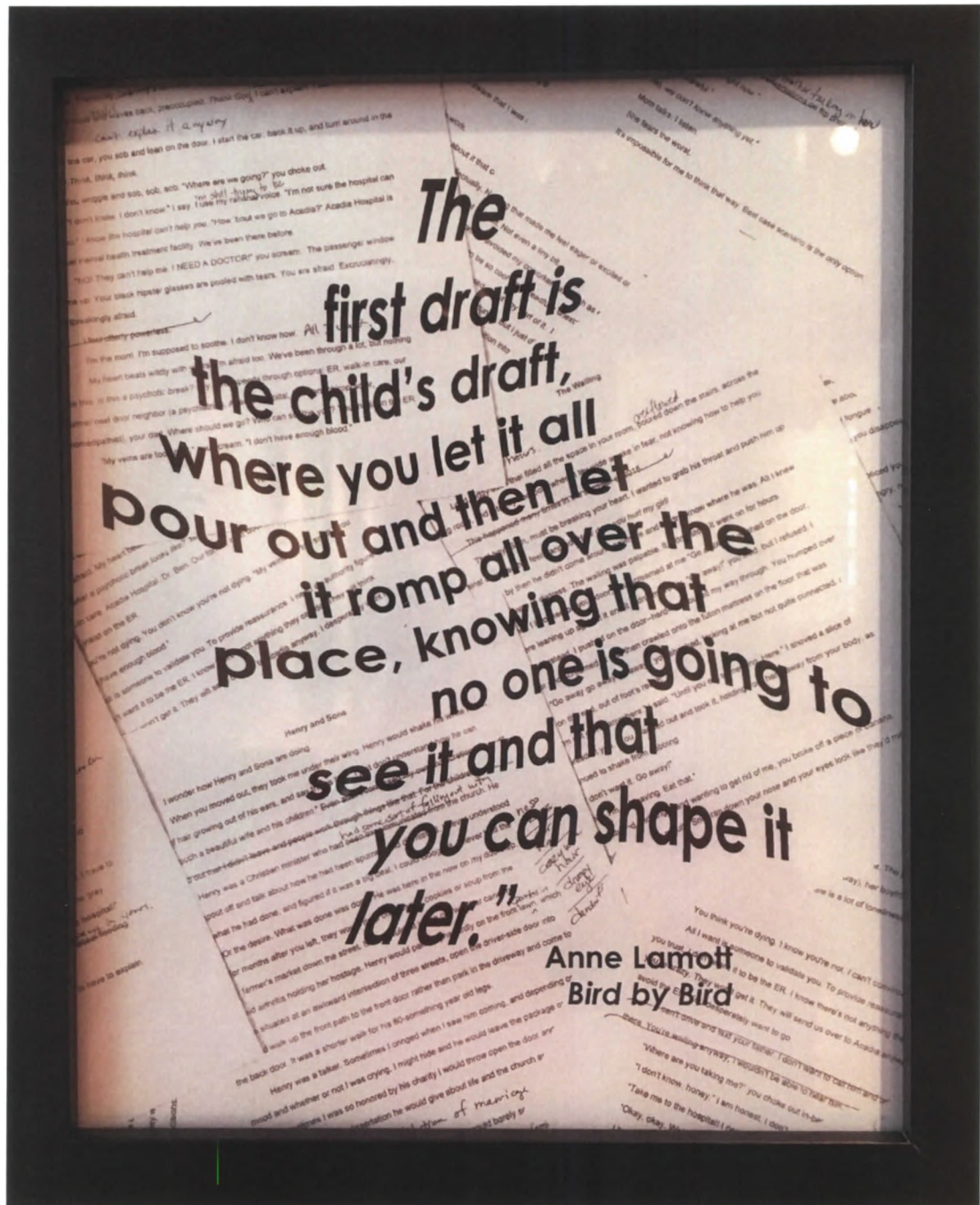


Figure 6. Write a shitty first draft

The best part about writing a first draft is the freedom. In the first draft, a writer doesn't have to worry about grammar, libel, whether the facts are straight, the names of people or places, or if anyone's feelings are getting hurt. A first draft is quite literally a

dumping ground of thoughts that can be refined later. The freedom of writing a first draft allows a writer to take risks and make space for real and raw truths emerge.

Edwidge Danticat says, “If you write the most honest first draft you can, I think that opens some pathways to better writing. Even if I take some things out later in the editing process, initially I write *everything*. The act of writing uncensored and freely for myself makes whatever ends up out in the world a lot more honest in the end.” (Haran 68).

I didn’t always write so freely. In an effort to shelter my children and myself (from revealing bad behavior or talking about their dad), I have written about certain circumstances using restraint and without revealing all the truths. Within these conditions, I’ve ended up with sterile and non-compelling drafts that didn’t reveal, inspire, teach, or enlighten (in the other words, they were not compelling in any way). On the other hand, when I write without censoring myself as I go, my work becomes much more alive and “real” because I allow myself to free-flow my thoughts.

“Don’t worry about what people will think as you’re writing a first draft,” says Dani Shapiro. “This manuscript will not magically fly from your desk and onto the shelves of your local bookstore. You’ll have to worry about people’s feelings once you’ve gotten a draft down. But if you begin with this kind of fretting you’ll stop yourself before you’ve even started.” (Haran 177).

Consult with your cast of characters (the beloved ones).

It would be impossible to write a memoir without involving other people. A memoirist is faced with a choice: to publish work about others without permission (protecting their identities by changing their name, disguising them with a different

physical description, or changing where he or she lives) or to ask permission. Judith Barrington says, “We must each come to our own decisions about the writer’s responsibility to those whose lives are entwined with our own, and whose stories inevitably overlap with ours. Each of us must balance the reasons for writing a story or for using real names, against the harm that might be done to someone else.” (131)

My choice is to ask permission from those whom I care about and disguise the others. For example, it is impossible for me to write about certain periods of my life without writing about my children (after all, some of my stories are also their stories), but I refuse to publish work about my children without their consent. I value my relationship with them far more than my desire to be published, so without their permission, I will put my work on hold (temporarily or permanently). On the other hand, I do not feel compelled to ask permission from my ex-husband to write about him.

“It’s a dance between being true to my need to write authentically and my responsibility to those around me not to cross into their private hearts and extract something that doesn’t belong to me,” says Sue Monk Kidd (Haran 121).

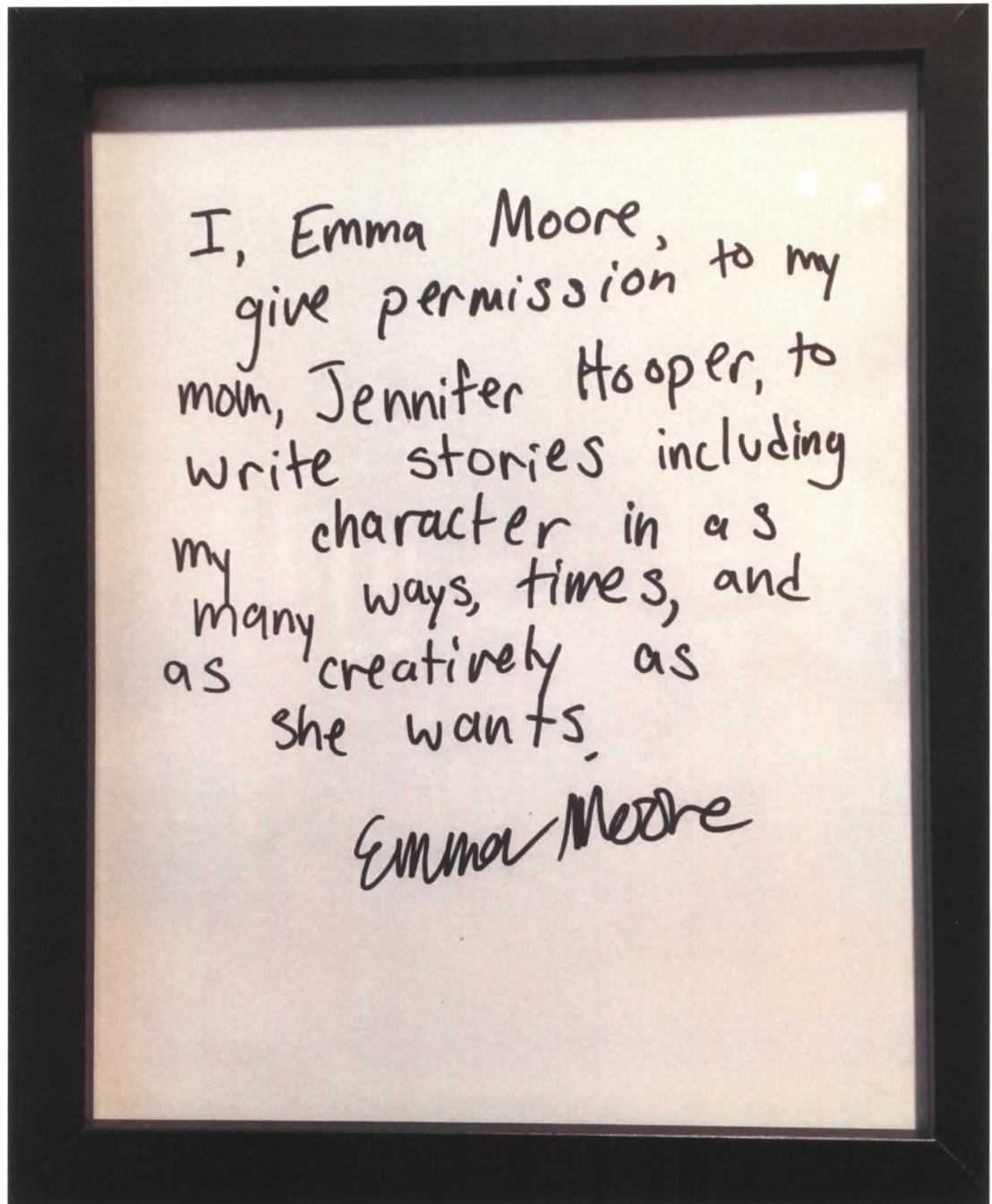


Figure 7. Consult with your cast of characters (the beloved ones)

Get feedback (and prepare to feel very vulnerable).

New readers see your work with fresh perspectives and different eyes. Getting feedback from others always makes your work stronger, but it isn't easy. One of the most challenging part is to find the *right* readers. I've had a friend "sit me down" and tell me she didn't think I should write about my children (I didn't ask her opinion). I've had people read my work and simply say, "I like it" (which is nice, but not particularly helpful). I've had people who've agreed to read my work but then never given me any feedback at all (leaving me to wonder if they ever read it or if they were too afraid to be candid).

The most powerful feedback I've received has always come from other writers: instructors, student peers, and members of my writing group. Writers tend to give the type of feedback that they would want to get, which is brutally honest. My peers help me uncover a range of issues from gaps in the writing, confusing passages, misspelled words, poor grammar, or advice for making a piece stronger. They also offer their overall feel for the work, as well as book suggestions that might be helpful.

"Getting feedback on your drafts is an invaluable part of the process. Memoir, in particular, can be difficult for you to read dispassionately. Since you are writing from experience, you may find it hard to know if what you have put on the page makes sense to the reader. You may think things are clear when they are not, because of all the background information you alone have...As in other kinds of creative writing, the structure and the language of your memoir can always benefit from the good editorial eye of an outside reader." (Barrington 164.)

Embedded within the step of collecting feedback are layers of vulnerability and doubt. This must be true for all writers, but I think it's particularly harrowing for writers who write about their own lives. *What will the reviewers think about me? How will they look at my family from now on? Will they like my work?* Memoir-writing often feels like you're bleeding all over the page, particularly on those pages when you cast yourself in an unfavorable light. You must be willing to experience this discomfort in order to get to the feedback you need.

“Like most writers, I show early versions of my work to a few people. And although these people almost always make useful, sometimes invaluable suggestions, it can be devastating when they don't totally love the material right off the bat. I don't think there's a writer in the world for whom the words 'This is a good start' don't make them want to punch the person who said it in the face” says Meghan Daum (Haran 78).

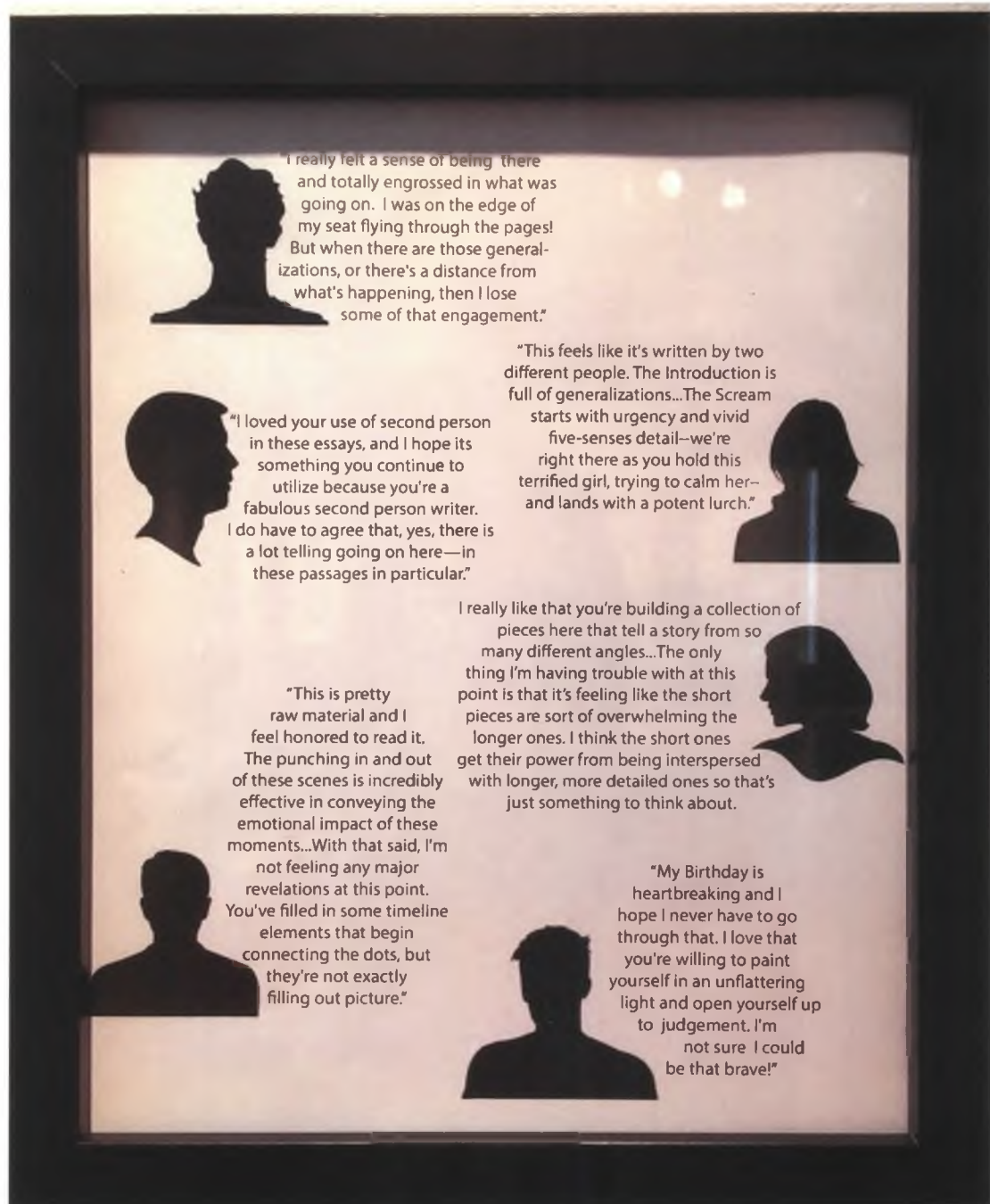


Figure 8. Get feedback (and prepare to feel very vulnerable)

Revise, revise, revise.

To revise means to “look back at, revisit, or see again.” The revision step provides an opportunity to make one’s work stronger. I revisit this step over and over in my practice: sometimes after time has passed, sometimes after I’ve collected feedback from others, and sometimes after I understand how a piece fits (or doesn’t fit) in the context of other pieces I’ve written. The revision process is my favorite step—I find it incredibly rewarding to make my work better—even though I also find it slow, challenging, and emotionally draining.

Hauser suggests several prescriptions for revising one’s drafts, such as adding dialog, changing tense, trimming dross, and using a thesaurus (among others). But for me, revising my work goes deeper. I turn my attention to the details and feelings of each moment. I attempt to enrich the words and phrases so they become richer: more vivid and felt, in the same way that Mary Karr describes:

“My own first drafts start with information, then I try to herd that information out of my head into a remembered or living scene. I often interview myself about how I came to an opinion. Then, rather than present an abstract judgment (“She was a thief”), I try to re-create how I came to that opinion. “She was a thief” becomes “I stared into the computer’s big green eye, inside which sat the web site where my diamond bracelet was being sold, Lydia’s email contact in the corner.” (Karr, “The Art of Memoir” 124).

Sue Monk Kidd said, “My strength, I discovered, was rewriting. I start with a raw draft, and I work and work and work. I’m notoriously slow and dogged and methodical about it.” (Maran 124). I can relate to Kidd’s statement. Contrary to writing a first draft, which often comes fast and furious, when I revise my work, I am slow, careful, and

attentive to every detail. To me, this attention is necessary to develop strong, robust writing that people will want to read.

Another important component to the revision process is to pick and choose what belongs. When I write my first draft, I write down everything I can think of. But when I revise, I strive to shorten the length of my drafts by at least one-half, persistently asking myself *Does this sentence or paragraph serve the overall purpose of the essay (or book)?* “Memoirists have to cull and pick and choose and be very discerning about what we put in and leave out of our stories. There should be a sign above the desk of every memoirist that reads, ‘Everything doesn’t belong,’” says Dani Shapiro (Maran 173).

Jennifer Hooper
February 22, 2016

exposed. I look like an uncoordinated hot mess of poor fashion choices, but I don't care. I keep going. I don't have much time.

I clutch-and-kick-shift through the gears and pick up speed. The wind rushes over my exposed neck and chin, and I shiver. For the first time, I long for a full-faced helmet, but at least ^{I have} ~~has~~ a face shield. I ride toward the shop.

At the last minute, I take a detour.

I bank a quick right into an industrial park, past the parking lot where I first learned to handle my bike. It's the place where I dropped her for the first time. ^{and picked her up by myself}

I ride through the neighborhood where I once came to wobbly stops, petrified of toppling over. ^{Now I stop & take off with confidence.} The corners that once plagued me now seem easy and fluid.

I ride down my favorite ^{city street} ~~in town~~ road that first curves to the left, then to the right. I ^{press} ~~push~~ slightly ^{down} on the left handlebar to go left; ^{press} ~~push~~ slightly ^{down} on the right handlebar to go right. I think ^{and forcing it out, over and over} back to the first epiphany of counter-steering. It was incredibly counterintuitive, but I finally got it.

I cross over multi-lane streets that ^{once petrified} ~~used to petrify~~ me and feel satisfied that I have conquered them. I smile and pass ^{cars} traffic that I was once convinced ^{were personally} ~~was~~ out to get me.

The trees are glowing torches, and I wish I had my camera ^{with me, then I} but remember that even ^{keep it} ~~when I do~~ strap ^{pad} it over my shoulder; I rarely bother to stop to take pictures; ^{stopping} ~~stopping~~ never seems like the right thing to do when I'm on the bike.

I think back to the ^{day} ~~time~~ when I dumped my bike in the gravel parking lot of an ice cream shop and later recounted how embarrassing the incident had been ^{to my daughter, I let the times} ~~to my 17-year-old daughter~~. She didn't laugh along with me. "See?" she said. "That's what I'm talking about....riding a motorcycle is dangerous."

Role reversal at its finest.

Figure 9. Revise, revise, revise

Read your work out loud.

Writers get a completely different perspective on their work when they read it out loud (compared to inside their heads). This holds true whether we read our work out loud to ourselves or whether we read our work out loud to others. Both provide valuable feedback.

“If you read your work out loud frequently—I not only work out loud, but I read out loud, or at least move my lips, when I reread later on—you will discover that your tongue is an excellent editor. If you trip over words in the same place more than once, most likely there is a problem with the flat passage. Take a good look at it. Perhaps you have left out information or included too much,” says Hauser (89).

Natalie Goldberg, author of *Old Friend From Far Away* explains “It’s a good idea from time to time to read aloud things you’ve written. When we write, often we don’t know what we have said, because as we move the hand across the page, we are paying attention to monkey mind, that critic always at our ear that rants on how we shouldn’t write, and who do we think we are?” She goes on to say “Reading to another human being is more naked than reciting to the wall. You are more exposed, can’t hide anymore. Get used to it. It makes your memoir alive. It closes the gap between what you believed you wrote and what you really wrote. It allows you to hear yourself, mirrored back from the silent mind of the listener.” (74)



Figure 10. Read your work out loud

I have been fortunate to have many opportunities to read my work out loud in various different settings, and each time, the opportunities have informed my work. I read out loud at home to myself, in classroom settings to my peers, and in public venues.

Repeat steps as necessary.

For me, writing a memoir is not a linear process (reflected in these non-linear steps). For example, at the same time I'm in the middle of revising the draft of one essay, I may be crafting another. Or if I'm waiting for feedback from reviewers on a piece of work, I may be leveraging an opportunity to read my work out loud in public. Or I may revisit a piece over and over (and over) within the revision step until I am satisfied that that the essay is complete, regardless of how much time it takes.

Due to this inconsistent nature of a writing practice, it is impossible for me to prescribe a formula for how many hours is necessary to spend on a particular each step or to provide a guideline for how many times it is necessary to repeat each step. All I can suggest is to repeat each step "until done." Repeating each step "as necessary" is an important part of a writing practice, but unique to each individual writer.



Figure 11. Repeat steps as necessary

Make it real.

Eventually, a writer must consider his or her work “complete.”

At this point, he or she must decide how they want to make their work available to the public. There are many options available today: distribute to family and friends, place on a website/blog, seek to publish an excerpt in a magazine, self-publish, or look for a publisher. There is no “right” or “wrong” to this decision; it is as unique as each individual person in the world.

“Will it have the flow and heft of a symphony, or will it be a collection of singular pieces, strung together the way songs are on a music album? Will it be arranged in parts, with smaller pieces in each part, or will it be in chapters, straight from beginning to end? Will it be arranged by season? By year? Will each chapter be about a place or a character?” (Hauser, pg 84). These decisions are different for every writer.

“Making it real” essentially means putting your work into the world, and that may look different for every writer. If a writer never shares his or her work, then what’s the point of doing the work in the first place?



Figure 12. Make it real

CHAPTER 4: THESIS EXHIBIT

In addition to developing a memoir-writing practice, as a part of my Intermedia MFA thesis, I prepared an art exhibit that appeared in the 2016 Without Borders show at the University of Maine in Lord Hall Gallery, from May 20 to July 2, 2016. The exhibit reflected the three pillars of my Intermedia practice: community engagement, entrepreneurship, and writing.

The final outcomes of my thesis project included:

- A series of personal essays that emerged as a result of my memoir-writing practice, titled *Things Work Out For Me*. Essays included were:
 - I Must Be Crazy
 - Things Work Out For Me
 - The Towel Rods
 - My Birthday
 - The Scream
 - The Mighty Oak
 - A Dark Cloud
 - The Last Ride of the Season
 - I Exhale
- A series of visual narratives, artifacts, and objects:
 - A series of 12 framed pieces displayed in a 4 x 3 grid that reflected my memoir-writing practice
 - A display case that showing artifacts and objects from a writing practice:
 - Writing journals

- Books and magazines on writing
 - Pages of drafts
 - Pens, highlighters, glasses, earbuds, ibuprofen, and other related objects
- A motorcycle, riding jacket, and helmet on display. These objects were included in the exhibit because they were central “characters” in my writing. The collection of essays begin and end with references to the motorcycle. Images of the motorcycle appear on the front cover, inside front cover, and inside back cover of my booklet.
- Maps of rides I have taken on my motorcycle.
- “Takeaways” for exhibit attendees, which is how I engaged the community with my work:
 - Copies of “Things Work Out For Me,” which I designed, edited, and self-published (a limited edition run of 50 copies). I displayed the booklet and made copies available for free in the gallery. The back cover included an entrepreneurial component by referencing my website and ways to connect with me on social media, including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn.
 - A temporary tattoo that said, “Things Work Out For Me,” also made available for free in the gallery



Figure 13. The steps involved in a memoir-writing practice



Figure 14. Partial view of thesis exhibit



Figure 15. Display case with objects from a writing practice

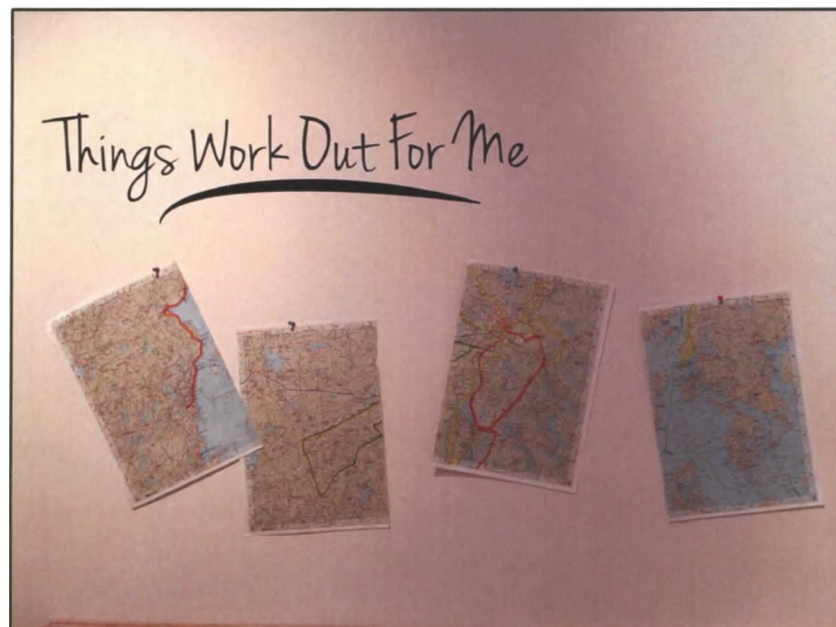


Figure 16. Maps displaying routes I've traveled by motorcycle



Figure 17. Free “Things Work Out for Me” booklet of essays



Figure 18. Free “Things Work Out for Me” temporary tattoo

CHAPTER 5: PORTFOLIO

My work in the Intermedia program can be organized into three broad categories: community engagement, entrepreneurship, and writing. This chapter reviews the work that I have completed in each of these three areas.

Community Engagement

Community Connector Mobile Phone App

This project started as a graduate-level assignment in a New Media class and evolved into a commercial mobile phone application in just five short months. The app, called the “Community Connector,” provides data about the Bangor-area public bus system from current schedules, routes, and bus arrivals to information about cost and bus stops.

The application began as a simple concept in October 2011, progressed through wireframe mockups, a web prototype, and video demo by the end of the fall semester, entered commercial development in January 2012, and became commercially available (for both iPhone and Android) in March 2012.

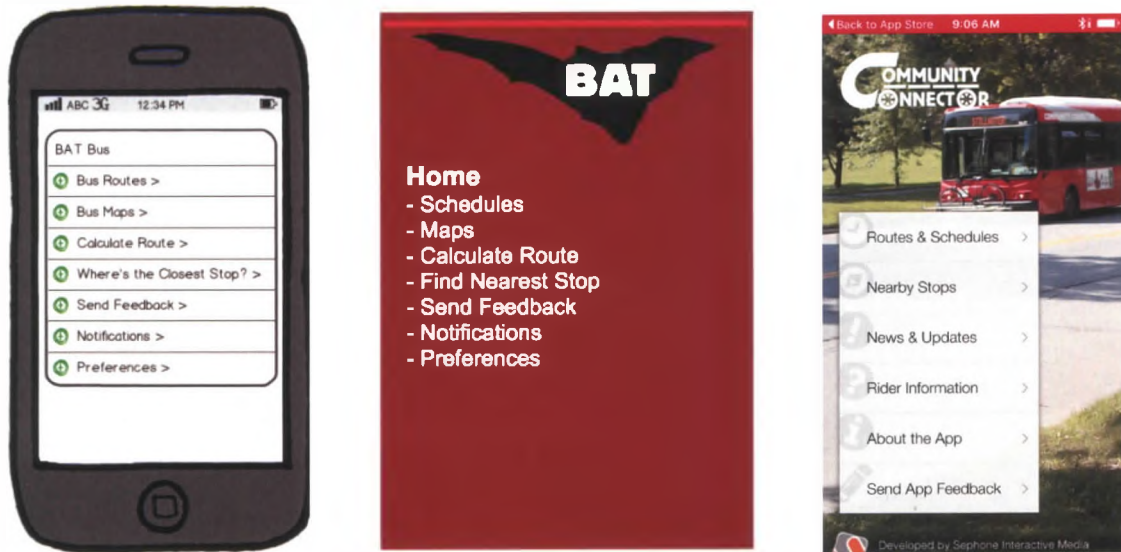


Figure 19. Wireframe mockup, web-based prototype, and completed commercial app for the Community Connector



Figure 20. Acknowledgment of collaboration with Sephone Interactive Media

This project gave me my first taste for community engagement and putting my work out into the world, and I enjoyed bridging the academic world with my local community. Through this collaborative effort, I earned the first University of Maine

President's Research and Impact Award, awarded by President Ferguson at the 2012 Graduate Exposition, as well as a "Student in the Spotlight" profile on the University of Maine Graduate School website.



Figure 21. Student in the Spotlight (photo by Amy Pierce, 2012)

I also gave a PechaKucha-style presentation at the Graduate Exposition about the Community Connector app, further bridging the project out of the classroom and into the community.

Spark Bangor

My experience developing the Community Connector launched an interest in pursuing more community engagement, more specifically, finding a way to use art engagements as a means to influence public planning practice and spur economic growth. I adopted the definition of **community engagement** as defined by Beavers and Hodgson (2011):

The process of public participation and involvement that promotes relationship building through learning, action, and the expression of needs and values.

Community engagement can bring vibrancy and innovation to planning practice by strengthening the degree of public commitment to planning processes and making more perspectives available to decision makers (p. 1).

To test this practice, I developed a community engagement case study in Bangor, Maine. My goal was to create a way for community members to express their thoughts and opinions about Bangor in a fun, interesting, and provocative way, extending beyond the traditional forms of community expression such as ballots, council meetings, surveys, and public hearings.

The case study took place at the downtown Bangor artwalk on November 16, 2012, and it was inspired by Candy Chang's "I Wish this Was" project. I called my project "spark!"

In preparation for this engagement, I did the following:

- Designed a logo for the project, which was used to identify and promote the event:



Figure 22. Spark logo

- Designed labels that offered a "fill in the blank" space, with the following heading: "With a magic wand, I would make Bangor better by..."



Figure 23. Spark label

- Secured a storefront location in downtown at which to hold the event.
- Developed an online presence for “spark!” to both promote and share the results of the event using Facebook, Twitter, a website, and a phone number for text messaging.
- Arranged to have the event published in the art walk map.
- Began to promote the event through social media approximately two weeks before the event using Twitter and Facebook.
- Hung a 4’ x 3’ poster at the storefront venue one week before the event.

On the night of the event, I distributed the labels to art walk attendees and asked them to “fill in the blank” using permanent black markers. Each label was affixed to the outside of the storefront window. I also affixed blank labels to the storefront window, and some people filled those in.

The entire engagement took place for three hours, from 5:00 pm to 8:00 pm. Over time, the window began to fill up.



Figure 24. Storefront window filling up with Spark logos

The feedback that I received during the event was very positive. After brief moments of uncertainty or confusion, once participants understood the engagement, their faces and expressions revealed enthusiasm and excitement. Participants made comments such as:

- “This is a great idea!”
- “I think Bangor should have <blank>”
- “Sure, I’d love to fill that out!”



Figure 25. Unknown participant writing on a Spark label

The responses collected at the engagement remained present on the storefront for two weeks after the artwalk. Passersby could read them and make their own contribution; I left blank stickers on the windows as well as colored pencils that people could write with. Overall, the responses ranged from serious to silly, with only two inappropriate or offensive remarks. A few examples are shown here:

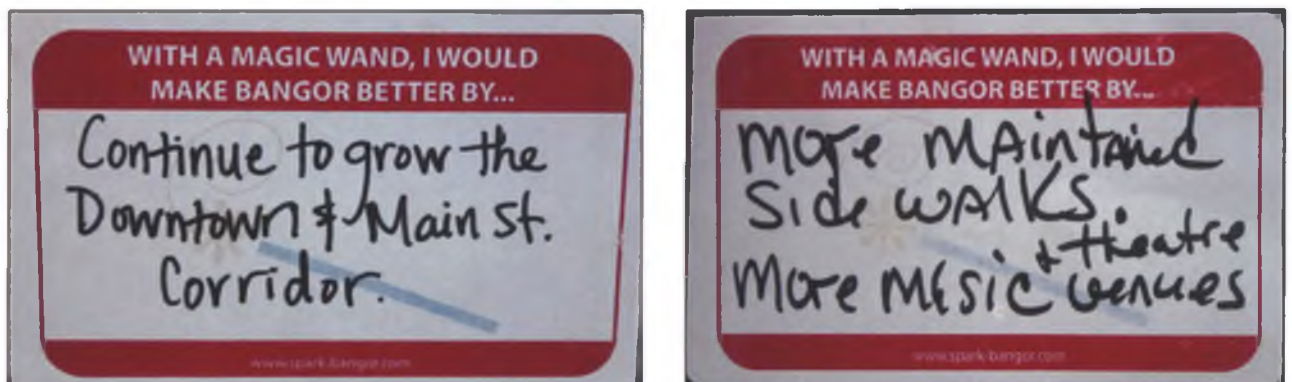


Figure 26. A sampling of Spark responses

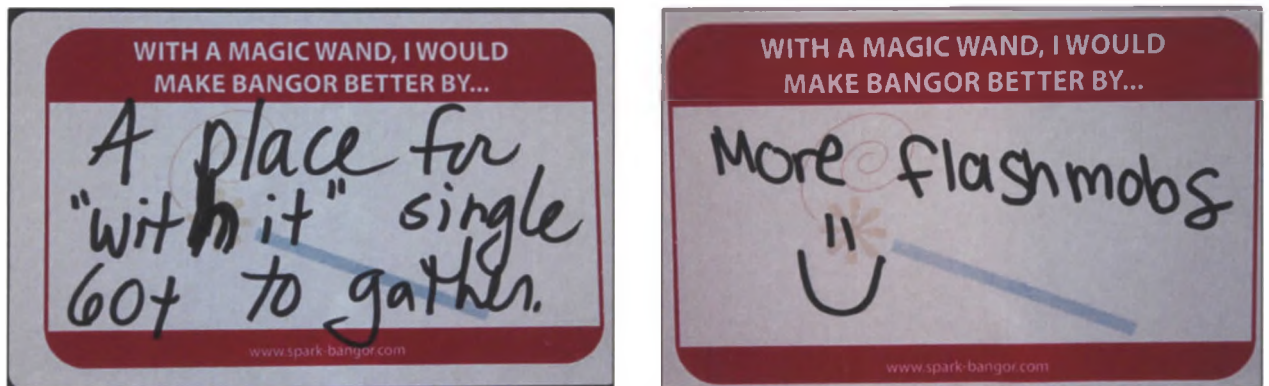


Figure 26 (continued). A sampling of Spark responses

The community participation and feedback from this case study prompted me to create more engagements where I could continue to collect ideas from the community for improving Bangor. I made each encounter unique.



Figure 27. Spark exhibit at the Intermedia Open House, 2013



Figure 28. Spark exhibit at Maine Civic Hack Day, June 2013



Figure 29. Spark exhibit at the American Folk Festival, August 2013



Figure 32. PechaKucha participants, August 11, 2013

Mural Project

After collecting ideas over several months, the next logical step was to actually put some of them in place! My first attempt to make an idea “real” was to explore getting a mural approved in downtown Bangor.



Figure 33. “Murals” Spark label

I spent a significant amount of time pursuing this goal, which involved:

- **Taking with City of Bangor officials.** I had several meetings with Jason Bird, the Downtown Development Officer for the city of Bangor. He supported the idea and helped me navigate through city regulations.
- **Identifying potential sites.** With Jason’s help, and using city zoning ordinances as a guide, we identified 6-8 potential sites in downtown Bangor.
- **Forming a committee of volunteers.** My committee consisted of Jason Bird (City of Bangor), George Kinghorn (Director of the UMaine Museum of Art), Orson Horschler (local artist), and Judy Boothby (committee member of Bangor’s Commission on Cultural Development). The purpose of the committee was to build logistical, financial, and governmental support for this mural project.
- **Pursuing grant funding.** I explored opportunities to

- **Began seeking non-profit status.** I met with Brian Molloy from Lanham & Blackwell to begin pursuing 501(c)(3) status for Spark.
- **Making pleas in front of the Bangor Historic Preservation Committee.** Along with Jason Bird, I made two presentations to this Bangor committee in an attempt to attempt to seek mural approval on those buildings located in a historic district.



Figure 34. A potential mural site

SparkFest

SparkFest was intended to be a new festival in Bangor, modeled after the WaterFire festivals in Providence, Rhode Island.



Figure 35. “Waterfire” Spark Label

In my effort to get this project up and running, I worked on the following:

- Spoke with City of Bangor officials.
- Attended multiple WaterFire events in Providence to witness the events.
- Connected with the Founders and Executive Director of WaterFire through emails and personal meetings.
- Identified a potential site in Bangor
- Formed a volunteer committee
- Explored fundraising avenues.
- Spoke with permitting agencies, like the EPA and Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife
- Explored how to make floating fire pits

This project involved a lot of moving parts, and I applied the skills I learned in Innovation Engineering to begin planning this event.

While I believe this event has much potential to thrive in Bangor, during the planning stages, I was forced to abandon my planning efforts due to personal reasons (my responsibility to my children when they needed support and services surpassed my commitment to this project). When I was once again able to give attention to my Intermedia studies, I found that my interests had shifted from pursuing SparkFest to developing a stronger writing practice.

Entrepreneurship

Throughout my entire Intermedia practice, I have woven a thread of entrepreneurship, which stems from my Innovation Engineering Graduate Certificate (and supported by my full-time position as Entrepreneur and Mentor Coordinator at the University of Maine Foster Center for Student Innovation).

Innovation Engineering Graduate Certificate

I used my Intermedia field study electives to earn a graduate certificate in Innovation Engineering. The certificate is designed to teach students how to creatively solve problems and create new ideas in any field, as well as lead organizations to innovate, whether the organization is a business, nonprofit organization, government agency, educational institution, or art organization.

The graduate certificate was comprised of the following three classes:

- **INV 510 Innovation Engineering Accelerated** - This class provides an array of tools and systematic approaches to creating, communicating and commercializing ideas, applicable to any field.

- **INV 511 Experience: Innovation Engineering Case Study** - In this class, students are allowed to pick a project and apply some of the Innovation Engineering tools and systems that they learned in the previous class. I chose “Spark” as my project. I applied several Innovation Engineering practices to this community engagement practice including insight mining, stimulus mining, “Create” tools, and surveys.
- **INV 590 Using Innovation: Proposal & Project** - This class emphasizes the intensive application of concepts explored in earlier Innovation Engineering courses to a student’s field of specialization, with the purpose of creating a proposal and project. For this class, I returned to the Community Connector mobile phone app. Using surveys, data mining, and math plans, I analyzed whether or not it was cost-effective to add a “mobile pay” feature to the bus app. I determined that the return on investment (ROI) would be lower than the cost of development and that it wouldn’t make sense.

Writing

Writing has been my most pervasive interest throughout my Intermedia MFA program. I entered the program as a tentative writer and have emerged feeling accomplished and excited about sharing my work in the world.

Begin Again

The first piece I wrote and shared with the public was a short story called, “Begin Again” that I wrote in my first critique class. I prepared the piece in a small book format

and made it available as a free takeaway at the 2011 Intermedia Open House. I also read it out loud to a live audience that evening.



Figure 36. “Begin Again” story

The back of the book had a QR code that, if scanned with a mobile phone, led to a private/hidden page on my website:



Figure 37. Photo on a hidden page on my website

The purpose was to make the book interactive and drive traffic to my website, again, reflecting my entrepreneurial endeavors.

Public Readings

Eat Your Words: A Literary Potluck

During spring break 2012, I attended a three-day writing workshop presented by guest lecturer, Nina Shengold. This was my first “real” writing class, where I was introduced to concrete strategies about short-form essay writing. I completed two finished essays in the three days, *Damani* and *Christmas Morning*. The workshop culminated with a public reading during a downtown Bangor artwork on March 15th at CoeSpace, Bangor, Maine.



Figure 38. Participants in the “Eat Your Words: A Literary Potluck” public reading

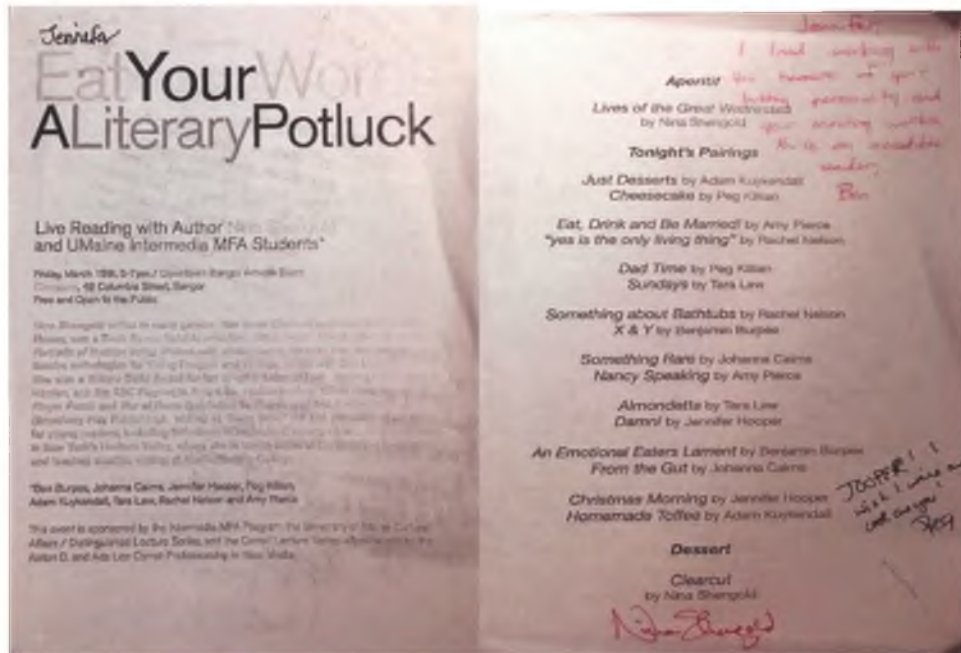


Figure 39. Program from the “Eat Your Words: A Literary Potluck” public reading

Use Your Words

“Use Your Words” was a public reading on May 2, 2014, Barrows Hall, University of Maine, Orono. Participants were the students in Nina Shengold’s first semester-long class at the University of Maine. I read an essay I’d written during the course called *Invisible Connections*.



Figure 40. Participants in the “Use Your Words” public reading

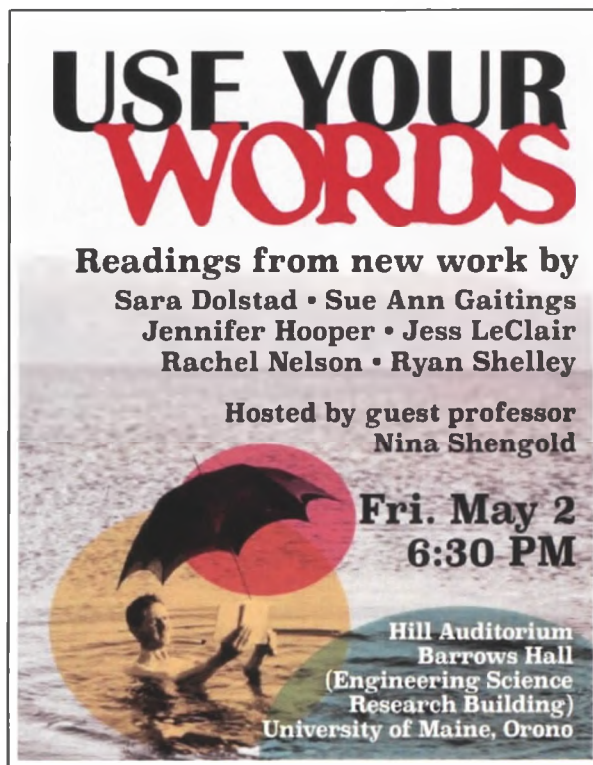


Figure 41. Flyer promoting the “Use Your Words” public reading

Words With Friends

In this public reading on May 2, 2014, Minsky Hall, University of Maine, Orono, I read an essay about learning to ride a motorcycle. Participants were the students in Nina Shengold's second semester-long class at the University of Maine.



Figure 42. Participants in the “Words With Friends” public reading



Figure 43. Flyer promoting the “Words With Friends” public reading

Blogs

To create outlets for my writing, I designed and developed two blogs while pursuing my Intermedia degree: “An Eager Life” and “Her Harley.”

An Eager Life

This blog originally had three voices (three writers) from three generations: my mother, myself, and my oldest daughter. The goal of the website

(<http://www.aneagerlife.com>) was to offer different perspectives on life and to encourage brave living.



Figure 44. Header for “An Eager Life” website, 2015

Unfortunately, not all participants remained engaged in this project, so after a year, I transitioned the website to my own personal website and blog, which profile my career writing endeavors. I continue to maintain this website today.

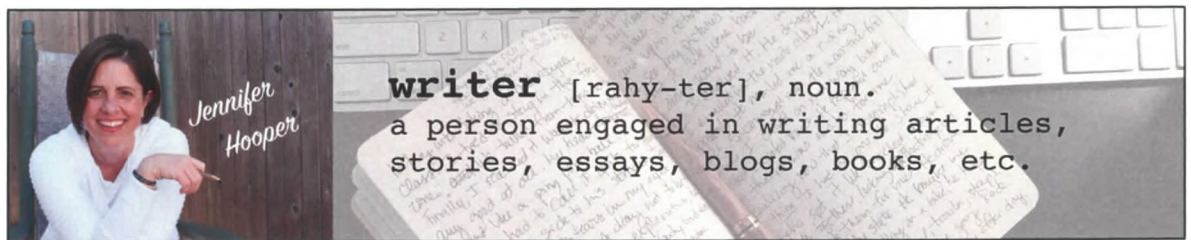


Figure 45. Header for “An Eager Life” website, 2016

Her Harley

I launched this website as a blog to help women learn, explore, and pursue riding motorcycles. The website is <http://www.herharley.com>. I blogged about my first year of riding, from taking a class, to dropping my bike, to starting to get comfortable. The blog has been on hold this year as I’ve been focusing my time on completing my IMFA.



Figure 46. Header from “Her Harley” website

Things Work Out For Me

“Things Work Out For Me” is the booklet or “zine” that I created in my final writing class at UMaine. It also serves as a piece of my final thesis project. I have inserted the finished project in the appendix of this document, which starts on the following page.

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Website

Goins, Writer

<http://goinswriter.com/good-writers-read>

APPENDIX: THINGS WORK OUT FOR ME

I have not yet completed my memoir. I have, however, spent roughly a half a year working on it. It has been a discovery process, in which I have walked through all of the steps outlined in Chapter 4. Through the processes of writing and reading, I have been learning and iterating. This foundational work is giving me a solid footing for my completed manuscript. As mentioned earlier, I have a collection of essays written in various forms of completion. The booklet found in the pocket of this paper reflects an excerpt from my collection of completed essays.

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Jennifer Hooper writes creative nonfiction essays and blogs that weave together real events with personal insight and reflection. Founder of the websites "An Eager Life" and "Her Harley," Hooper is a candidate for the Intermedia Master of Fine Arts at the University of Maine in August 2016.

Hooper has been a writer her whole life. Before turning her attention to creative writing, Jennifer held several business-related writing positions that included working as a technical writer, commercial real estate appraiser, and communications coordinator.

An old soul who believes in intuition and self-trust, Jennifer has two teenage daughters and acknowledges they all have a lot to learn from each other. Jennifer is passionate about writing, entrepreneurship, and raising her daughters to be good people. She lives in central Maine. She is a candidate for the Master of Fine Arts degree in Intermedia from the University of Maine in August 2016.